



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

NOTES ON A NAVAJO WAR DANCE¹

THE following notes were made at a dance which took place at Kayenta, Arizona in June 1914. They are somewhat fragmentary owing to the fact that features of the ceremony were going on in different places at the same time.

The sick man for whose relief the function was given, had, when a young man, looked upon the bodies of two Navajo who had been killed by the Comanche. His trouble arose from the idea that the evil spirits of these enemies possessed him, as it is said to be "bad" to look upon the body of a person slain by one's enemy. The ceremony was directed by a medicine-man who charged a large fee for his services.

The first part of the ceremony took place at a distance of about three miles from the hogan of the sick man, and had to do with the preparation of the "war wand." This wand consisted of the top of a cedar tree from which the bark and all the sprigs except a bunch at the top had been removed. About this stick tied with a deer-skin string, cut from the hide of an animal that had been strangled or smothered, were bunches of white and green sage, several turkey feathers, two eagle feathers, and a package of "medicine," nature unknown. The whole was decorated with long streamers of red cloth. This wand was carried throughout the entire ceremony, which lasted three days, by a young girl, and I saw her still carrying the wand as she rode away.

The part of the ceremony connected with the preparation of the wand that I saw, consisted of dancing by the men. The dance started about dark, continuing through the night and although there were several hundred Indians assembled at the spot, only a few took part in the dance, the greater number looking on or sleeping about the fires.

The dance consisted of singing by two groups of men who lined up facing each other, each line having a leader at the head who chanted in a high falsetto voice a verse which was repeated by his party in concert. The leader of the opposite side followed with a verse which was repeated by his band, and so on. The singing was accompanied by drums beaten by the leaders. The men in each line stood as close together as possible, the lines surging slightly in time to the drums, the dancers at times taking a few shuffling steps. Men were continually dropping out and others taking their places. Now and then I caught a glimpse of the young girl carrying the plumed wand. To all appearances the dance was a contest of endurance between the two lines of men.

¹ Cp. Franciscan Fathers, *An Ethnologic Dictionary of the Navaho Language*, St. Michaels, Arizona, 1910, pp. 366-376; E. C. Parsons, *American Anthropologist*, N.S., vol. XXI, no. 4 (1919).

At daybreak the dancers rode with a great firing of guns to a large brush house that had been erected near the hogan of the sick man. They were met a little way out by a party of horsemen also firing guns. This appeared to be a sham battle. Soon all the Indians were assembled around the hogan of the sick man; I saw him rushing about, very busy with final preparation. He looked perfectly well but somewhat dishevelled, as his hair was hanging loose. In the hogan of the sick man, two Indians, who were to enact the part of scouts, were being prepared with elaborate ceremonies that consumed nearly three hours. I was not able to gain entrance to the hogan but was told by Professor Cummings who was more fortunate that a good part of the time was spent in painting the bodies of these men, that frequently the attendants who did the painting paused, after using various pigments, to go through the motions



FIG. 15.—Upper left, dance circle; upper right, dance circle open to the east; lower left, painting wife of sick man; lower right, cleaning feathers to be worn by scouts.

of washing their hands in the sunlight that streamed through the smoke-hole.

At the same time that the "scouts" were being prepared, the wife of the sick man was receiving attention in a brush shelter just in front of the hogan. I was able to observe a part of this ceremony, as the shelter

had only a roof, though the Indians crowded about and made a clear view difficult at times. The wife sat facing the east with a blanket spread over her knees. At each corner of the blanket sat a woman attendant; at her back squatted an old woman who seemed to have charge of the proceedings. This old woman first drew a black line on the face of the wife extending from the ears around the lower jaw, after which black was applied to different parts of the body. Finally, the arms, legs, and practically the whole body of the wife was rubbed with powdered charcoal.¹ Occasionally as the painting proceeded the old woman would hand the wife some object which was immediately concealed by her under the blanket. An old Hopi bowl filled with some liquid of uninviting appearance was passed to the attendants, each taking a sip. It was afterwards handed to several women who seemed to be only spectators, who took a taste.

While these preparations were in progress 12 to 16 Indians, all men except the young girl with the war emblem and another girl about the same age, danced in a circle (fig. 15) about a handfull of ashes and a slender stick with a wisp of hair attached to it. This wisp of hair was from the scalp of a Comanche killed by the Navajo and had been obtained with great difficulty from a distant part of the reservation.

The dancers shuffled around to the singing of a leader, who also beat a drum made of a small pot with a piece of skin stretched across the top. At the end of each verse the dancers paused. In these stops the circle was always left open to the east; it seemed quite important that nothing should cross or obstruct the east. At one time several women started to ride over well out on the flat, but were warned back by a great outcry from both dancers and spectators. Another time horsemen were sent out to turn back some stock that would have crossed nearly two miles out.

Presently a very old man, nearly blind, came from the hogan, and, guided by an Indian who appeared to be the master of ceremonies, took the stick with the wisp of hair from the circle of dancers and carried it some 300 yards east across the flat, pausing once to make a motion like striking the ground or an imaginary enemy. At the end of this journey the old man's guide asked him in a loud voice, what his name was, but the old man being very deaf did not understand, and the question was repeated louder and louder at which the Indians looking on seemed greatly amused. Finally having received a satisfactory answer the guide returned to the hogan leaving the old man. The two scouts now emerged from the hogan wearing kilts or aprons of cloth, bandoliers, and bracelets of yucca leaves, and having feathers tied in their hair. Their bodies were

¹ According to the Franciscan Fathers, it is the patient who is painted black.

painted black. These men ran rapidly out to where the old man stood, performed some ceremony over the wand which he had placed on the ground, made motions to the sky with the hands raised palms upward, then ran back to the hogan. What happened after this I was unable to note, except that about this time gifts of cloth and other articles were thrown out through the smokehole of the hogan to be caught as they fell by a number of women who waited in line about the door. The remainder of the day was devoted to horse racing and other games.

The event closed with a girls' dance which started about 12 p.m. The belle of the ball was the bearer of the sacred war emblem which she still retained. The dance was performed thus: each girl selected a partner by force who must either dance or pay. Holding her partner by the arm or blanket she turned slowly backward with the man as a pivot, he exerting himself just enough to maintain their relative position and apparently requiring more or less urging for even this slight effort. Both wore all the time a bored expression, the man looking rather sheepish as well. How long this dance continued through the night I do not know, but I saw no change or pause in the three hours I watched it. The most exciting part of the entertainment was furnished by the horses which occasionally stampeded in bunches of a dozen or more and, blinded by the glare of the fires, ran over anything in their way.

There were six or seven hundred Indians present. A few formed a rather uninterested audience. The greater part, however, spent the the night eating or sleeping. From Mrs. John Wetherell I learned that the very old man who was led out on the flat was supposed to discover the enemy and give the alarm. The scouts then go out and locate the enemy, returning to guide a war party who surprise and drive them away, recovering at the same time a young woman who had been captured in a previous raid. The dance about the wand and lock of hair was a part of the rejoicing at the recovery and the success of the war party, though the sequence of these events do not seem quite in order. The young girl who carried the war emblem represented the rescued maiden.

These notes barely sketch the ceremony, a great many features of which I missed altogether. Others perhaps I misinterpreted from lack of knowledge.

I asked Mrs. Wetherell if the sacred war emblem might be obtained in any way but she said it would be considered a great affront to even suggest such a thing to the medicine-man. His wife however, allowed me to look at it and while I was thus engaged managed to steal my jackknife.